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PERFORMANCE TRACKER | LOCAL

Inside England and Wales's prisons crisis

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About this report

This report looks at the crisis in the prisons system in England and Wales, comparing performance in different prisons and using regression analysis to examine what might be driving differences in performance around the country. It is the first in the Institute for Government's new *Performance Tracker | Local* series, supported by the Nuffield Foundation.

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Summary

The prison system in England and Wales is in an extremely poor state. Levels of violence, self-harm and drug use are shockingly high, prisoners' work and education opportunities severely limited. Buildings are crumbling or in severe disrepair, many dangerously so, and physical conditions often unsanitary.[1,2] Inexperienced staff are struggling to cope with these increasingly fraught circumstances.

The failure of successive governments since at least the early 2000s to expand the number of places to meet the growing number of prisoners has put severe pressure on capacity and exacerbated this decline.[3] Deep funding cuts implemented in the early 2010s have still not been fully reversed, even as the prison population has hit new highs.[4] And while capital investment has risen sharply in recent years, this is focused on building new prisons and is insufficient to address the growing maintenance backlog.[5] In just the last two years, eight prisons have been issued with 'urgent notifications' by the prisons inspectorate, escalating serious concerns directly to the secretary of state.[6]

Cuts to prison officer numbers as part of the coalition government's austerity programme began to bite from 2012/13, with officer numbers in 2013/14 down 26% from 2009/10 and then staying flat until 2016/17, even as the prison population rose.[7] Recruitment since 2017/18 has partially reversed this, but many of these new officers have been to staff new prisons, leaving the number of prison officers per 1,000 prisoners in March 2024 still 8% below 2009/10 levels. Crucially, even as workforce numbers have recovered, the average officer is now much less experienced than before staff cuts. This combination of reduced staff numbers and experience is likely to have contributed substantially to prisons' overall declining performance.

That is the national picture. But what is the situation within individual prisons? Which are doing better or worse, and what might be driving that? This report – the first in a new series of analyses of public services at the local level across England and Wales from the Institute for Government and funded by the Nuffield Foundation – digs into the detail of prison performance to answer some of these questions.

We find widespread decline across most prisons on a range of measures. Violence, self-harm and 'protesting behaviours' have risen sharply across almost all prisons. However, some buck the trend – particularly open prisons (category D sites). Clearly this is at least in part to do with the types of prisoner these prisons hold. But that is not the whole story, with open prisons continuing to outperform other categories even as the prisoner mix has changed in the last year.

What is clear is that overcrowding and a lack of purposeful activity for prisoners are significantly associated with poor performance, especially violence. Reception prisons, with the highest levels of overcrowding and lowest purposeful activity, are over-represented among the worst performers.

What does a good prison look like?

Fairly judging how a prison is performing requires an understanding of what prisons should do – what outcomes they aim to produce, for whom, and at what cost. This will vary between types of prison.

We look at a range of indicators to understand how prisons are performing. Violence is a key one: prisoner-on-prisoner and staff assault rates are a useful all-round performance indicator that tend to capture multiple factors that are hard to see otherwise in the data.[8] Violence often reflects prisoner frustration that might stem from any or all of limited access to work, visits and health care;[9] poor relationships withprison officers; prison processes being seen as unfair and illegitimate; and declining physical conditions in prison.[10,11] The drug trade within prisons is also a potential driver of violence, related to enforcing debts or controlling the market.[12] Protesting behaviours, such as 'incidents at height' (climbing on netting and roofs) and barricades (physically obstructing staff access to parts of the prison) also reflect these harder-to-see factors.

We also consider pressure on prison capacity via overcrowding, the prison 'regime' (the routine that sets when prisoners are allowed out of their cells for meals, work, education and so on) and workforce metrics such as staff sickness and resignation rates. We do not look at rates of prisoner escapes, as these are low enough to make it hard to interpret variation across prisons or over time.

While all prisons aim to achieve public protection, punishment and rehabilitation of offenders, different prisons have different roles and different categories of prison perform different roles. High-security (category A) prisons hold prisoners who pose the most threat to the public or national security. Category B prisons are long-term prisons for serious offenders serving longer sentences, or who are fairly high-risk but do not need to be in a high-security facility. As 'training' prisons, they focus on long-term training, education and rehabilitation for prisoners. Reception, or 'local', prisons are also category B, but hold remand prisoners (those waiting for their trial or sentencing) and short-term prisoners, who do not have time to progress through the prison system (for example, if their sentence is too short to go through the process for being recategorised). Some prisons hold a mix of remand and other category B prisoners.

About two fifths of prisons are category C prisons, which hold almost half of all prisoners. They are divided into three categories: training, resettlement (intended to prepare prisoners for release) and both training and resettlement. Open prisons are category D and have minimal security: prisoners have more freedom to move around the prison and can apply for day release for work or education, or to spend time with family. There are 12 women's prisons, of which two are open and 10 closed (non-open, higher security sites).

Key recommendations

- **Establish a 'minimum regime' across prisons – adequately funded and with targets on purposeful activity.** Levels of purposeful activity are currently very low, which limits rehabilitation and may be contributing to violence and drug use. Establishing a minimum regime for each prison category would increase the focus on purposeful activity and hopefully improve conditions. This should be accompanied by the funding realistically needed to allow prisons to deliver this activity.

- **Explore options for expanding access to open prisons.** Open prisons have much better conditions and outcomes than other prison types, in addition to being cheaper to run.[13] While this is clearly partly due to the prisoners they hold, it may be possible to expand access to open prisons safely. The government should conduct a thorough evaluation of the temporary presumptive recategorisation scheme, introduced in 2023 to move more prisoners into open conditions earlier in their sentence. This could lower overall violence, save money and improve outcomes.

- **Identify elements of the open prison model that could be applied to other prisons.** Naturally, not all prisoners will be suitable for open conditions, but there may be aspects of the regime in those prisons – such as more purposeful activity and greater responsibility around the site – that could bebeneficially applied to closed prisons as well.

- **Build on recent successes targeting employment after release.** There havebeen real successes in recent years in improving prison outcomes, especially around employment. This has the potential to help reduce reoffending rates and facilitate productive rehabilitation, and should continueto be a focus in future.

Most of the findings in this paper are based on statistical analysis of published data, but we also carried out several interviews with experts and two prison visits. See the Methodology section in the Annex for more details.

How has performance changed over time?

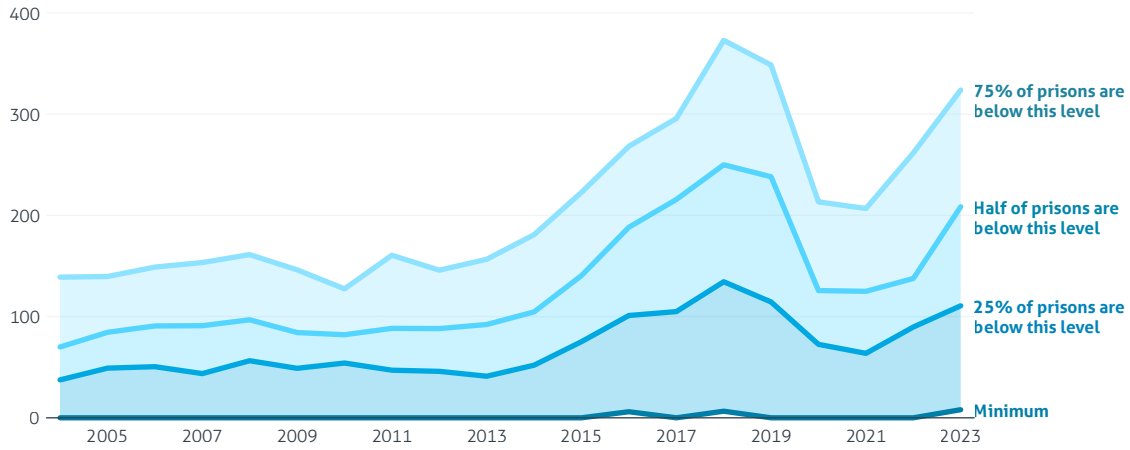
Performance declines are widespread if not universal – though the gap between best and worst has grown substantially

Declining performance is not universal across prisons. But it is widespread, with rates of violence, protesting behaviours and self-harm all rising in a clear majority of prisons. These measures all began rising sharply from around 2014, fell to varying degrees in response to the pandemic, then began climbing again and are now nearing or surpassing their pre-Covid peaks.

This pattern is reflected across the system, with prisons across the whole range of performance now having higher rates of violence than they did 10 years ago. In 2013, nearly two thirds of prisons had fewer than 100 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults per 1,000 prisoners. By 2023, less than a quarter could say the same.[14]

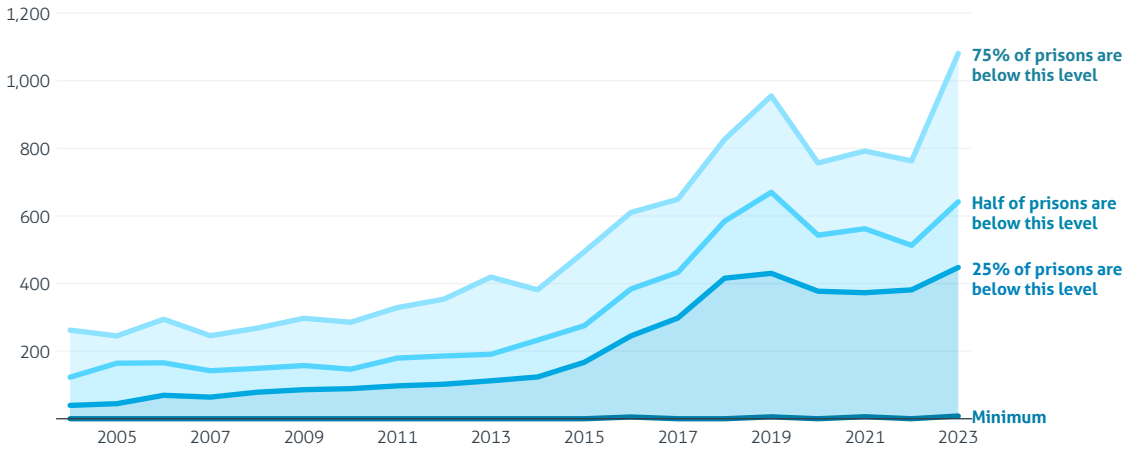
Self-harm rates show a similar picture, though with a much smaller decline during the pandemic. The median has increased fivefold, from 123 incidents per 1,000 prisoners in 2004 to 642 in 2023.[15] Some of this may be down to improved recording practices, but interviewees suggested it reflects a real and sustained increase.

Figure 1 **Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults per 1,000 prisoners, by prison, 2004–23**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024' (Chapter 2 Tables– Prison crowding) and MoJ & HMPPS, 'Safety in custody: quarterly update to December 2023'. Notes: Rate per1,000 prisoners is calculated based on the average population for each prison in the 12 months ending in Marchof the following year. The maximum is extremely high and very variable, so has been excluded to show the broader trend more clearly.

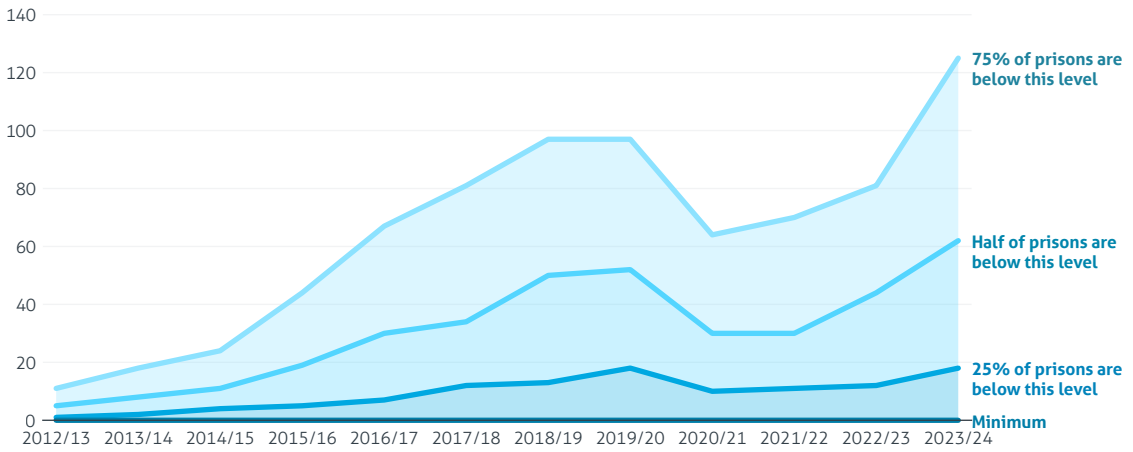
Figure 2 **Self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners, by prison, 2004–23**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Safety in Custody: quarterly update to December 2023' and MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024' (Chapter 2 Tables – Prison crowding). Notes:Rate per 1,000 prisoners is calculated based on the average population for each prison in the 12 months ending in March of the following year. The maximum is extremely high and very variable, so has been excluded to show the broader trend more clearly.

The trend is even more pronounced for 'incidents at height', the most common form of protest in prisons. This includes things like climbing on netting or roofs and is sometimes used by prisoners to get an opportunity to speak directly with prison officers, as it typically means they will be taken to segregation afterwards. Incidents at height have dramatically increased since 2012/13 in almost all prisons. Then, 13 incidents per 1,000 prisoners would have put a prison in the worst 20% of prisons. In 2023/24, the same rate would put it in the *best* performing 20%.[16]

Figure 3 **Incidents at height per 1,000 prisoners, by prison, 2012/13–2023/24**



Source:Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024' (Chapter 2 Tables – Prison crowding and Chapter 7 tables – protesting behaviour). Notes:Rate per 1,000 prisoners is calculated based on the average population for each prison in the 12 months ending in March of the following year. The maximum is extremely high and very variable, so has been excluded to show the broader trend more clearly.

"[As a prisoner] there are so few staff on the wing, so [incidents at height are] the lever you have to pull to get their attention" – voluntary sector organisation

The gap between the better and worse performers has grown in absolute terms. For example, in 2003, the worst 25% of prisons had more than 138 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults per 1,000 prisoners. This was 61 higher than the median prison. In 2023, the rate for the worst 25% of prisons had risen to 324, some 115 above the median. In relative terms the increase has been bigger at the middle: the median assault rate has risen 171% in that time, while the third quartile has risen 134%. Similar patterns apply to incidents at height and self-harm.

Prisoner participation in 'purposeful activity' – including education, employment, offending behaviour programmes and vocational qualifications – has also dropped sharply over the last 14 years. There is limited available data on this at prison level, particularly before 2023/24,* though the prisons inspectorate and Independent Monitoring Boards have repeatedly raised concerns about the lack of activity in prisons.[17,18] Interviewees also highlighted that this is a widespread problem, with many prisons offering at best a 'part-time' regime where prisoners may have just two half-day sessions of activity a week.[19]

Some outcomes following release have improved substantially, bucking the general trend

Not all performance measures are moving in the wrong direction. There have been notable improvements in some outcomes after release, specifically the proportion of prisoners housed on their first night in the community and the proportion in employment six weeks later.

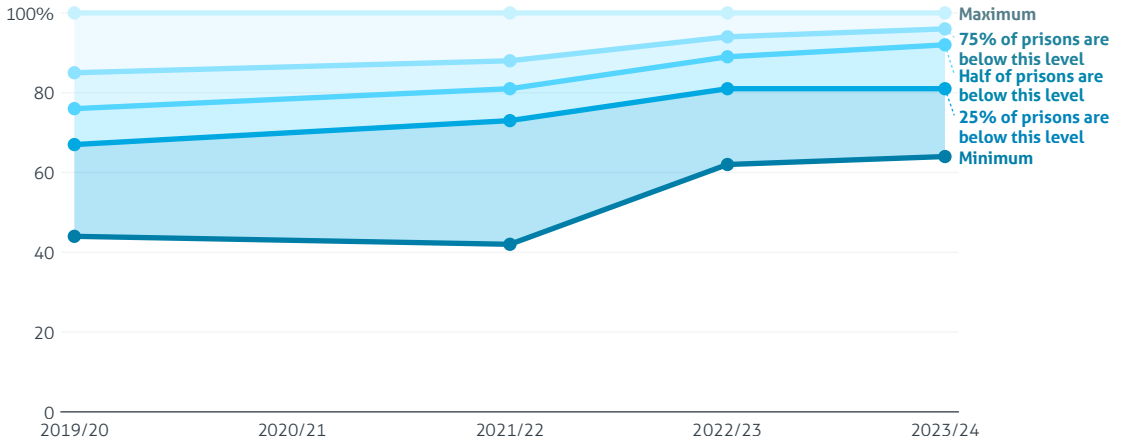
In the median prison, 92% of prisoners were housed on their first night after release in 2023/24. This compares to just 76% in 2019/20. The worst performing prisons have improved the most, with the minimum rate rising from just 42% in 2021/22 to 64% in 2023/24.[20] Perhaps surprisingly, this increase comes despite resettlement support within prisons having declined in recent years and the probation service being extremely overstretched and rationing support and supervision.[21]

The improvement is likely to have been driven by the expansion of the Community Accommodation Service (CAS-3), piloted in five areas from 2021 and rolled out more widely in July 2023. Whereas traditional accommodation support within prisons involves referring prison leavers to local council homelessness teams and commissioned support services, CAS-3 directly provides up to 12 weeks of emergency housing for those at risk of being released homeless. This has changed the types of accommodation people have on first leaving prison.

Nationally, there has been a large rise in prison leavers spending their first night in short-term probation-provided accommodation, up from 11% in 2019/20 to 25% in 2023/24; at the same time, the proportion in settled accommodation has fallen from 49% to 45%.**,[22]

* We look at variation in the most recent year below.
** Settled accommodation is long-term, stable accommodation.

Figure 4 **Prisoners housed on the first night after release, by prison, 2019/20–2023/24**



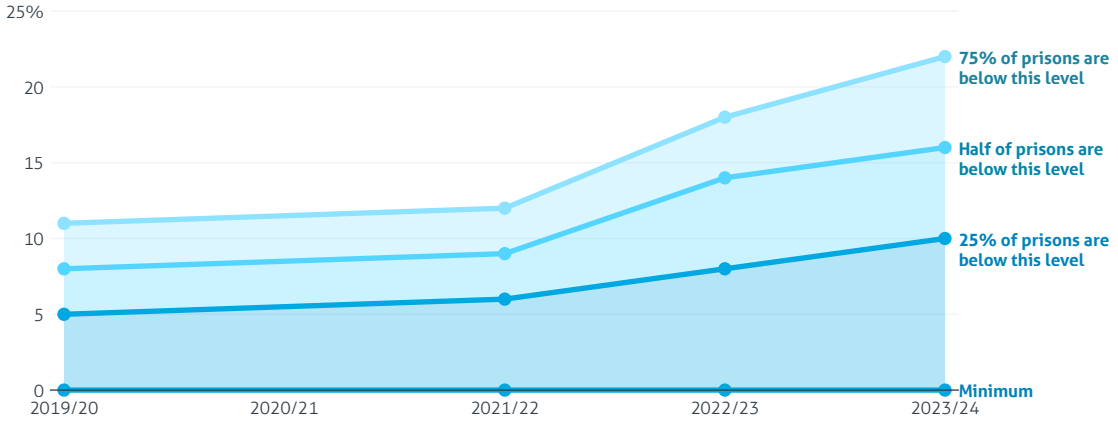
Source:Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023-24 Supplementary Tables'. Notes:Data is not available for 2020/21 or before 2019/20.

The improvement in first night housing is unfortunately not sustained longer term: data for individual prisons is not available, but nationally the proportion of prisoners in settled accommodation three months on from release has fallen slightly, from 75.3% in 2021/22 to 73.5% in 2023/24.[23] This suggests that the short-term housing support via CAS-3 has had a positive impact, but problems remain when it comes to longer term outcomes.

Employment outcomes after release give a more consistently positive picture, however, with substantial and sustained improvements for most prisons since 2019/20. The best performers are invariably, and unsurprisingly, open prisons – given 25–30% of prisoners tend to be employed in the community during their sentence through release on temporary licence.[24] The average employment rate six weeks after release in open prisons is more than twice the national average at 43%. Improvements over the past four years have been widespread, though, with almost all prisons roughly doubling their six-week employment rates since 2019/20. Employment gains are also spread across all sentence lengths and offence types: while those serving longer sentences typically have higher employment rates after release, prisoners serving all sentence lengths have seen substantial improvements.[25]

Only among the worst performers, which includes all category B and high-security prisons, has there been no improvement. But the employment rates for these prisons may be distorted by the relatively small number of prisoners who are released directly into the community from these prisons. Specialist sex offender prisons, such as Stafford, also typically have very low rates of employment after release.

Figure 5 **Prisoners employed six weeks after release, by prison, 2019/20–2023/24**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023-24 Supplementary Tables'. Notes: Data is not available for 2020/21 or before 2019/20. The maximum is much higher than the 75th percentile, so has been excluded to show the broader trend more clearly.

Given the severe limitations on purposeful activity in prisons and resettlement support, as well as the rationing of probation supervision, this is a surprising finding – especially when conditions within prisons themselves have declined so substantially. The improvements that have been seen in prisoners' employment outcomes after release may be the result of the government focusing much more on this since 2018.[26]

The New Futures Network was set up within HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to engage directly with employers to find job opportunities for prison leavers. This team is likely to have been less affected by capacity pressures and staff shortages than the resettlement offer provided by front-line prison and probation officers, which may have made it more effective. Other initiatives launched as part of the programme include dedicated 'employment leads' to provide the equivalent of a Jobcentre in prison. These were set up in 92 prisons by July 2023, and early evidence suggests that those prisons with employment leads have improved employment rates relative to those without them.[27]

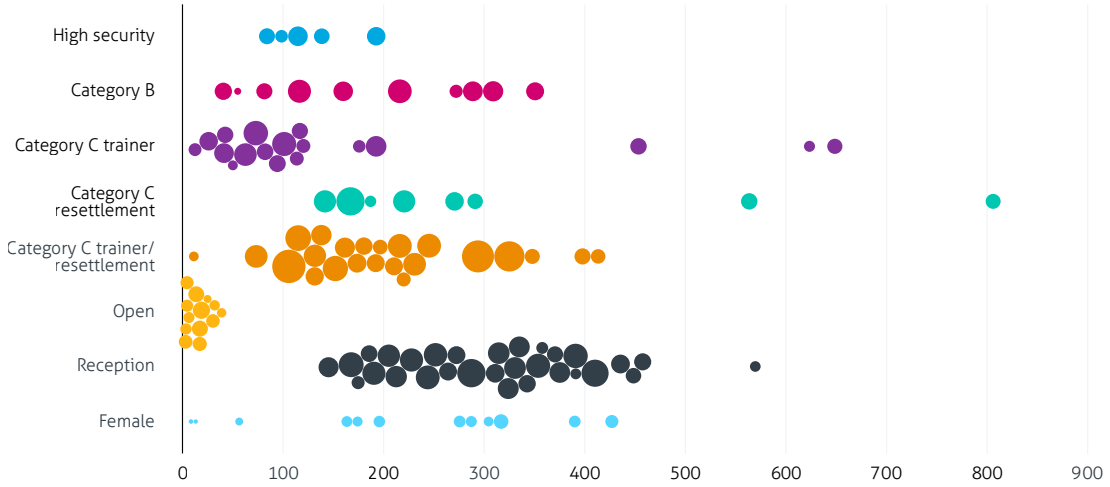
Despite these improvements, the employment rate of prison leavers remains low overall: 19% at six weeks after release and 31% at six months. The overall rate is raised by a small number of high-performing prisons. Only 10% of prisons had a six-week employment rate above 36% in 2023/24, and these are all open prisons (including both women's open prisons). Not all prisons are likely to be able to achieve such high post-release employment rates, as those serving short sentences or convicted of sexual offences are likely to struggle more to secure and hold down employment. Nonetheless, widespread improvements in recent years suggest even the prisons with the most challenging cohorts can improve employment outcomes, so the government should maintain and build on recent successful programmes.

Which prisons do well?

Some prisons perform much better than others – particularly open prisons

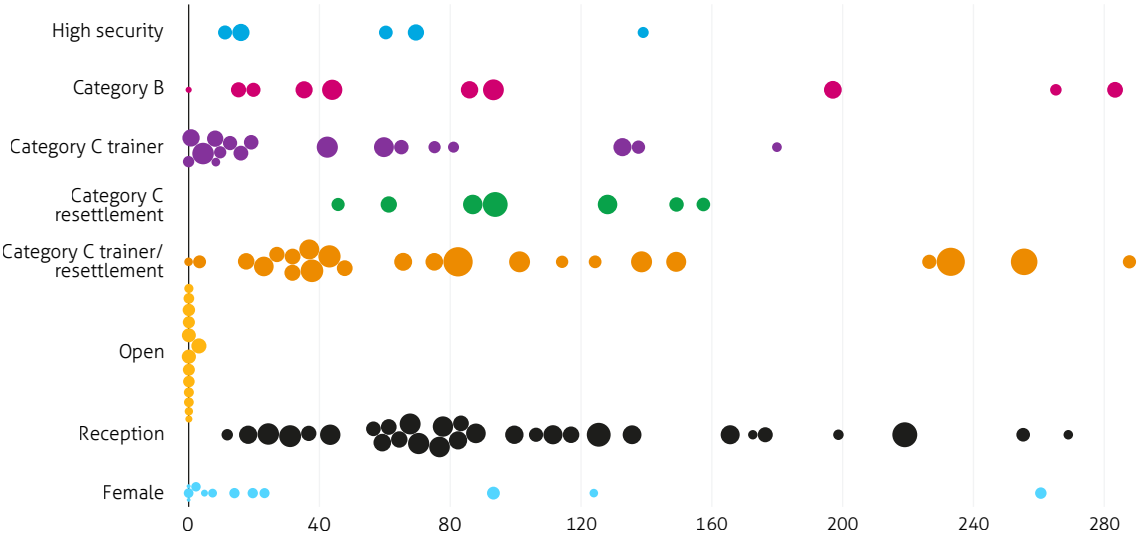
Performance is poor across many prisons, but this is not a uniform picture. There is dramatic variation between the best- and worst-performing prisons: the prisoner-on-prisoner assault rate for 2023/24 ranged from 8 per 1,000 prisoners to 914.[28] We see similar results for other performance measures, from housing on release to protesting behaviours to participation in work or education.*

Figure 6 **Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults per 1,000 prisoners, by prison type, 2023/24**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023–24 Supplementary Tables'. Notes: The centre point of each dot marks the approximate value for that prison and should not be used to read exact values for individual prisons. Dot size indicates the average population in each prison for 2023/24.

Figure 7 **Incidents at height per 1,000 prisoners, by prison type, 2023/24**

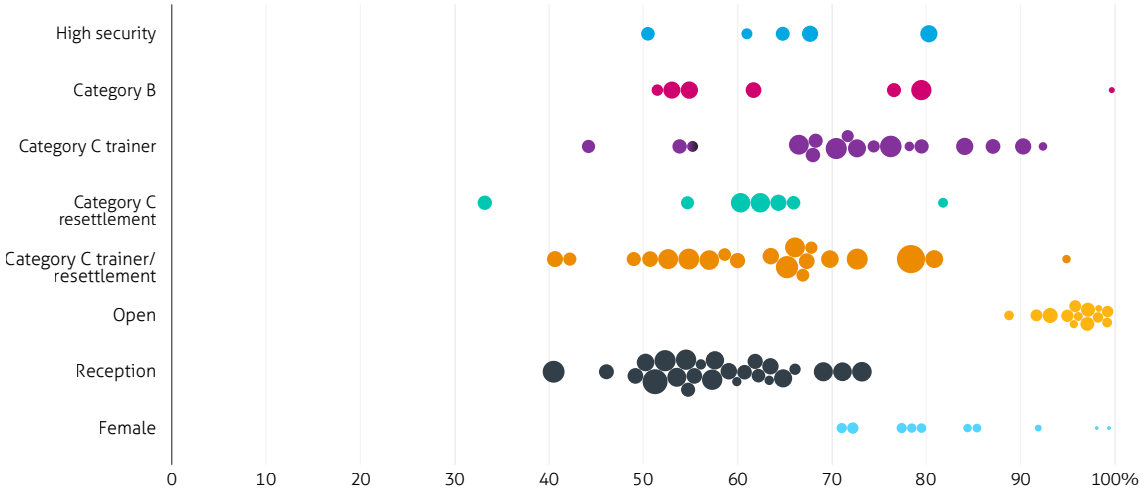


Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Prison Performance Ratings: 2023 to 2024 Supplementary Tables'. Notes: The centre point of each dot marks the approximate value for that prison and should not be used to read exact values for individual prisons. Dot size indicates the average population in each prison for 2023/24.

* We only have data on the proportion of prisoners taking part in at least some purposeful activity, not the total amount of purposeful activity being delivered.

Some types of prison perform better than others, but open prisons are the clear stand-out across all metrics. Most category C training prisons have lower levels of violence and protesting behaviour and higher purposeful activity rates compared to other categories, but there are a few clear outliers. Both of these findings may be significantly driven by the different types of prisoners housed in these types of prison compared to others, as discussed below. Some other prison types have a more mixed picture. High-security prisons have relatively low levels of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and incidents at height, but relatively higher staff assaults. Women's prisons show a similar pattern, though with far higher staff assaults and drastically higher self-harm rates. The median staff assault rate in women's prisons is 278 per 1,000 prisoners, by far the highest of any prison category.[29]

Figure 8 **Proportion of prisoners in purposeful activity, public prisons, by prison type, 2023/24**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023-24 Supplementary Tables'. Notes: The centre point of each dot marks the approximate value for that prison and should not be used to read exact values for individual prisons. Dot size indicates the average population in each prison for 2023/24. Private prisons have been excluded as purposeful activity data is not available.

Reception prisons is consistently the poorest performing category, especially on violence and participation in purposeful activity. This group has experienced the most acute pressure and crowding during the capacity crisis and usually have more limited purposeful activity as standard, as they are intended for shorter stays. They also hold remand prisoners who are yet to be convicted and so are exempt from prison rules requiring prisoners to work (though they may choose to work if they wish).

Reception prisons are also disproportionately Victorian-era inner-city prisons, and are often in very poor physical condition: Pentonville, for example, had such a severe rat infestation in its kitchen that catering was temporarily shut down in April 2024, after the Independent Monitoring Board referred the situation to the local council environmental health service and the prisons minister.[30] Five of the eight prisons that have received an 'urgent notification' in the last two years – in which the prisonsinspectorate raises concerns directly to the secretary of state – have been reception prisons.

There is broad consistency in which prisons do well and badly both over time and across the range of performance metrics we look at.* Twelve prisons (10% of those for which we have data) are in the worst 20% across at least half of the metrics we look at – and seven of these are reception prisons (compared to 25% of all prisons).

We see an even stronger pattern in reverse among the best performers. Twenty-one prisons (18% of the total) are in the top 20% of prisons across at least half of the available performance metrics. This includes all open prisons, which do well across the board, but also a few from other categories, including Stafford (category C trainer), Warren Hill (category C trainer/resettlement) and Grendon (category B). The closed prisons in this group are not typical category B or C prisons: all have a particular cohort (for example, sex offenders) and/or rehabilitative purpose (such as intensive psychotherapy) that they serve. There are no reception prisons in this group. The two women's prisons among the top performers, East Sutton Park and Askham Grange, are both open prisons.

Excepting open prisons, there is generally more variation *within* prison categories than between them

Despite these general trends, on the whole variation is greater within prison categories than between them, with the clear exception of open prisons. Some other categories are outliers on specific metrics, such as female prisons having much higher rates of self-harm and, to a lesser extent, high-security prisons having lower levels of prisoner-on-prisoner assault. Nonetheless, the interquartile ranges, which represent the middle 50% of prisons within each category, for most prison categories overlap substantially. In practical terms, this means that if you were given all the performance data for any individual prison, it would be extremely hard to identify which category it was in – unless it was an open prison.

This is a potentially surprising result. Staff levels vary substantially across prison categories, and they are often dealing with quite different prisoner cohorts. Category C training prisons, which are specifically intended to provide education and training, do mostly have higher levels of purposeful activity than most other closed (non-open) prisons. But this is still some way off the level in open prisons, and other category C prisons are not meaningfully different to other prison categories. Interviewees suggested that recent years have seen a compressing of the differences between categories. Capacity pressures mean prisoners have been placed wherever there is a cell available, rather than in the category most suitable for them,[31] and the widening gap between good and poor performers within categories may also reduce differences between categories.

> **"One thing we have definitely seen is an erosion of differences between types of prisons. You used to be able to differentiate [between categories] but that's just not true now" – voluntary sector organisation**

* These metrics are: the proportion of prisoners in crowded accommodation; the prisoner-on-prisoner assault rate; staff assault rate; self-harm rate; incidents at height rate; barricade rate (when prisoners obstruct staff access to part of the prison); educational progress in English and maths; attendance at education courses; achievement of vocational qualifications; percentage of prisoners in purposeful activity; percentage employed at six weeks following custodial release; percentage employed at six months following custodial release; percentage housed on the first night after release from custody; the staff sickness rate and the staff resignation rate. See the Annex for the full table.

Some of the variation in performance is driven by differences in prisoner populations...

Prison performance is substantially affected by the specific cohort of prisoners in each prison. Those serving long sentences, particularly those with no fixed release date such as life sentences, are often considered to be more stable and less likely to become involved in violence.[32,33] Grendon, for example, is the best-performing category B prison across a host of metrics, and also has a lower reoffending rate than similar prisons.[34] But it has a highly selective offender cohort. It is a dedicated therapeutic prison, and prisoners have to volunteer to transfer to Grendon. Those who are considered 'not ready' for therapy or who do not engage with their therapeutic programme may be transferred out, and most offenders are serving long sentences.[35] Similarly, Stafford is one of the best performing closed prisons and is a specialist sex offenders' prison. Prisoners serving time for sexual offences are generally thought to be less violent in prison and more likely to abide by prison rules.[36,37]

The same arguments apply to open prisons, which only accept prisoners assessed as a low risk to the public and unlikely to be involved in offending while in prison. Many of these prisoners have already served long periods in prison and are interested in work and training while in custody. And at the other end are reception prisons, which receive a large number of offenders who are regularly in and out of prison and are often only in custody for a short period. These prisoners tend to be younger and are more likely to be violent and less likely to engage in purposeful activity.[38]

...but differences in prisoner characteristics are unlikely to explain all the variation in performance between prisons

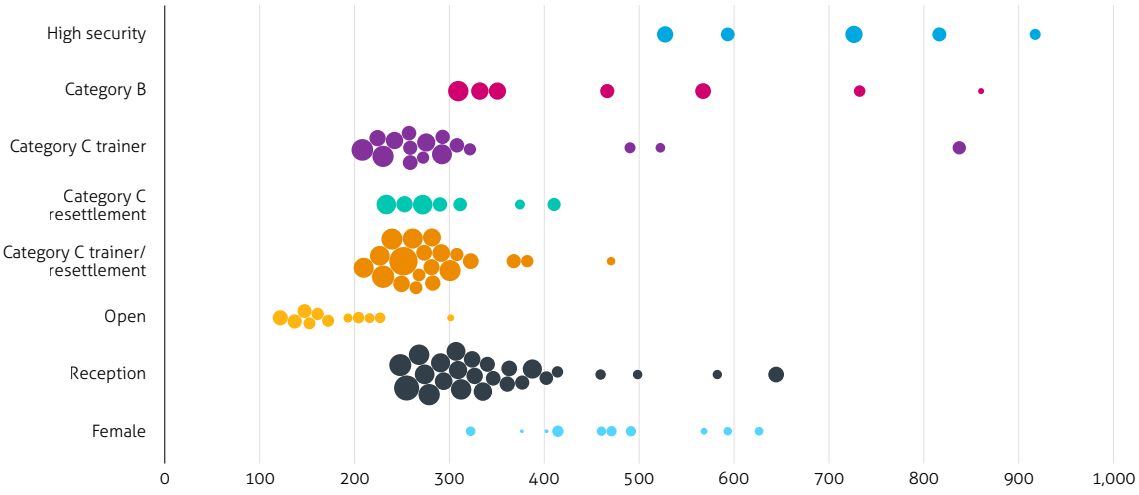
However, these cohort effects are unlikely to explain *all* the variation in prison performance. There are significant overlaps in prisoner cohorts across most category B, C and open prisons, and these distinctions have only become more blurred as a result of capacity pressure in recent years. Some prisoners have been left struggling to access open or resettlement prisons despite meeting the requirements.[39] Others have been moved more rapidly into open prisons under the temporary presumptive recategorisation scheme,[40] introduced in March 2023 to move certain category C prisoners automatically to open prisons unless to do so would pose a "wholly unacceptable risk".[41] Despite these changes, violence and protests in open prisons remain much lower than in other prisons.

Dramatic variation *within* categories similarly often cannot be entirely explained by differences in the prisoner cohorts. For example, Woodhill is the only category B prison in our list of worst-performing prisons, and one of only two to have received an urgent notification. It is principally a training prison for long-term prisoners, with relatively few new arrivals each week and 95% of prisoners serving a sentence of four years or more, or an indeterminate sentence. This makes the prisoner cohort similar to many other category B prisons such as Dovegate or Gartree, and yet Woodhill has much higher levels of violence, self-harm and drug use, severe staff shortages, low morale and extremely limited purposeful activity.[42] These cannot be attributed principally to the prisoner cohort. Warren Hill, by contrast, performs very well and provides a very safe environment, despite holding many high-risk offenders.[43]

Higher security prisons generally have more officers per prisoner, but there are some extreme outliers

High-security prisons have the highest number of band 3–5 prison officers per 1,000 prisoners, though there is still substantial variation within this group (from 528 to 918).[*,44] Category B prisons, the next highest security group, also tend to have more officers than other categories, though to a lesser extent. What is particularly striking is how some prisons stand out as major outliers relative to the rest of their category. For category C training prisons, for example, the median number of officers per 1,000 prisoners is 274, while the maximum is 838 – higher than all but one high-security prison. The same is true of the maximum for category B prisons. This shows that a handful of prisons account for a disproportionate share of officers and are therefore much more expensive to run on a per-prisoner basis.

Figure 9 **Band 3-5 prison officers per 1,000 prisoners, public prisons, by prison type, 2023/24**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024' and MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2024'. Notes: The centre point of each dot marks the approximate value for that prison and should not be used to read exact values for individual prisons. Dot size indicates the average population in each prison for 2023/24. Private prisons have been excluded as workforce data is not available. Prison officer numbers based on full-time equivalent.

* Front-line prison officers are divided into three groups: band 3 and 4 officers, which includes some specialist officers; band 4 supervising officers and band 5 custodial managers. Prison staff numbers are all based on full-time equivalents, rather than headcount numbers.

What might be driving differences in performance?

How to interpret this section: regression analysis findings

This section reports our findings from multivariate regression analysis. This technique is used to look at the relationship between two variables when controlling for other factors. For example: looking at how prison crowding relates to assaults on staff, assuming the prison category, prison officer to prisoner ratio and other relevant factors are all kept the same. This does not let us say one variable causes a change in the other, but it does let us see if a high level in one variable tends to go along with a high or low level in the other variable.

The factors we controlled for in the analysis are:

- Prison category
- Number of prisoners in the prison
- Proportion of prisoners in crowded accommodation, meaning they are sharing a cell or room with more occupants than it was designed for
- Number of operational and non-operational staff per 1,000 prisoners, and the share of operational staff in each band
- Proportion of prisoners in purposeful activity
- Staff resignation rate

The charts in this section show how an **absolute** change in one factor (e.g. a 1 percentage point increase in the number of prisoners in crowded accommodation) affects the **absolute** level of other variables (e.g. one more staff assault per 1,000 prisoners). We also include 95% confidence intervals for our results. There is a 95% chance that the true value lies within this range. We consider results **statistically significant** where this range **does not cross zero**. Where a result is not statistically significant, it may still be informative, but may just reflect random chance, so should be interpreted with caution.

All other things being equal, violence and protests are higher in overcrowded prisons

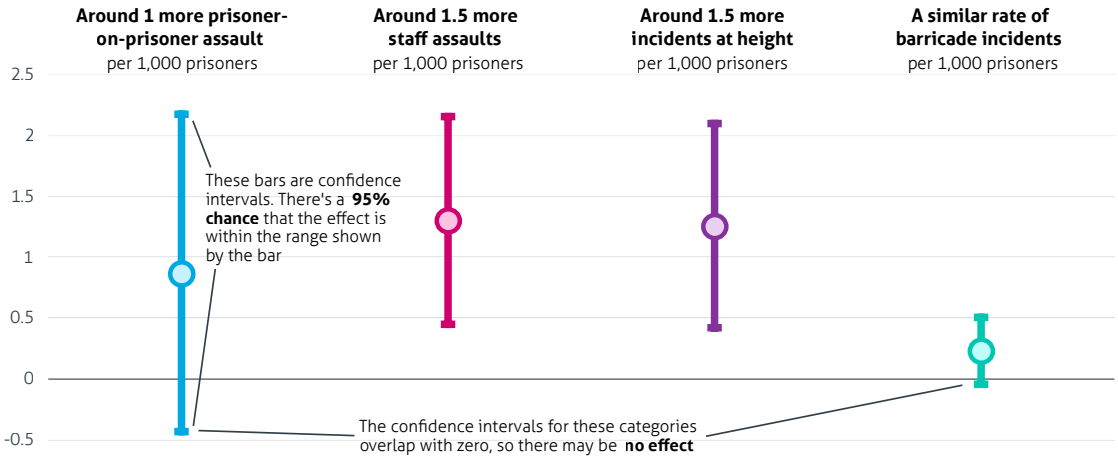
A higher proportion of prisoners in crowded accommodation is associated with higher rates of violence and protesting behaviour. For assaults on staff, a 1 percentage point increase in the proportion of prisoners in crowded accommodation implies around 1.3 additional assaults on staff per 1,000 prisoners. The median prison has 11% of prisoners in crowded accommodation. Moving from this point to the 75th percentile,

with 34% in crowded accommodation, implies an additional 32 staff assaults per 1,000 prisoners – an increase of more than a third. Incidents at height show a very similar pattern, with the same increase in crowding rates implying almost a 50% increase in the number of incidents at height per 1,000 prisoners (92 vs 62).

While we cannot identify a causal relationship between crowding and violence or protesting behaviour based on this analysis, these are fairly strong relationships.

For prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, the effect is less clear. They may also be slightly more common in more crowded conditions, but the effect is smaller – at less than one additional assault per 1,000 prisoners for every 1 percentage point increase in crowding, a finding that is not statistically significant meaning there may be no effect. It is possible that prisoner-on-prisoner violence is less likely to be reported or observed by staff in a very overcrowded prison, whereas staff assaults are more likely to be reliably recorded.

Figure 10 **Each 10 additional prisoners, per 1,000 prisoners, in crowded accommodation implies:**

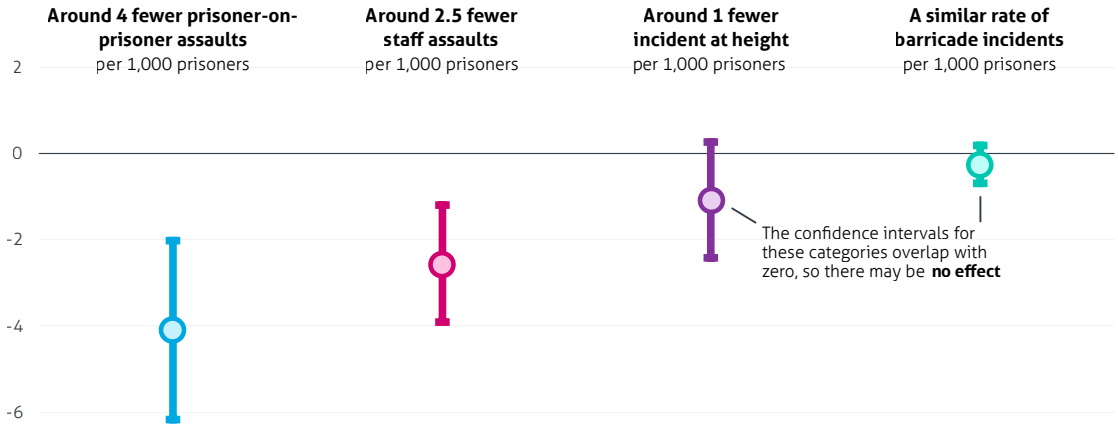


Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024', MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2024', and MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023 to 2024 Supplementary Tables'. Notes: Based on 2023/24 data. Public prisons only; private prisons have been excluded due to data gaps. This chart shows the output from a multivariate regression; see Methodology for details.

Higher participation in purposeful activity is strongly associated with lower violence and protest

Purposeful activity has an even stronger relationship with violence rates, with prisoner-on-prisoner and staff assaults both lower when more prisoners are engaged in it. Each percentage point more prisoners (10 per 1,000) engaged in purposeful activity implies around four fewer prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and 2.5 fewer staff assaults per 1,000 prisoners. A prison with 80% of prisoners engaged in purposeful activity (the rate at the 75th percentile) will have an estimated 26% fewer prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and 17% fewer staff assaults than the median prison (where 67% of prisoners are engaged in purposeful activity). Incidents at height may also be less common where more prisoners are engaged in purposeful activity, though this effect is not statistically significant.

Figure 11 **Each 10 additional prisoners, per 1,000 prisoners, participating in purposeful activity implies:**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024', MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2024', and MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023 to 2024 Supplementary Tables'. Notes: Based on 2023/24 data. Public prisons only; private prisons are excluded due to data gaps. This chart shows the output from a multivariate regression; see Methodology for details.

This finding is particularly interesting because purposeful activity involves prisoners spending time out of their cells mixing with other prisoners, which on the face of it might provide more opportunities for violence. The large drop in violence in 2020/21, for example, is typically attributed to prisoners spending almost all their time in their cells as almost all purposeful activity and time out of cells was suspended due to pandemic-era social distancing regimes. Indeed, some prison officers and leaders have been reluctant to return to a pre-pandemic prison regime for fear violence levels would increase. In 2020 the Prison Officers' Association called for the extreme Covid restrictions on time out of cells to be made permanent in order to keep prisons "well ordered, less violent and more stable".[45]

Our findings suggest that time out of cells does not increase violence and may even have the opposite effect. This aligns with other evidence showing that purposeful activity can improve behaviour in prisons.[46] There are various reasons to think that providing more opportunities for purposeful activity could reduce violence. Prisoners are often keen to work to be able to buy goods from the canteen and make phone calls, so lack of access to earning opportunities may increase frustration.[47] Boredom and irritation if prisoners are spending long stretches of time in their cells with little activity may also increase the risk of violence. This may also increase the use of illicit drugs (which in turn can drive violence).[48,49]

> **"Prisoners who don't receive money from outside can only get it by working. If they're not able to work [because there are no jobs available], that means they can't pay for phone calls to family or buy things to make the prison environment bearable." – senior prison officer**

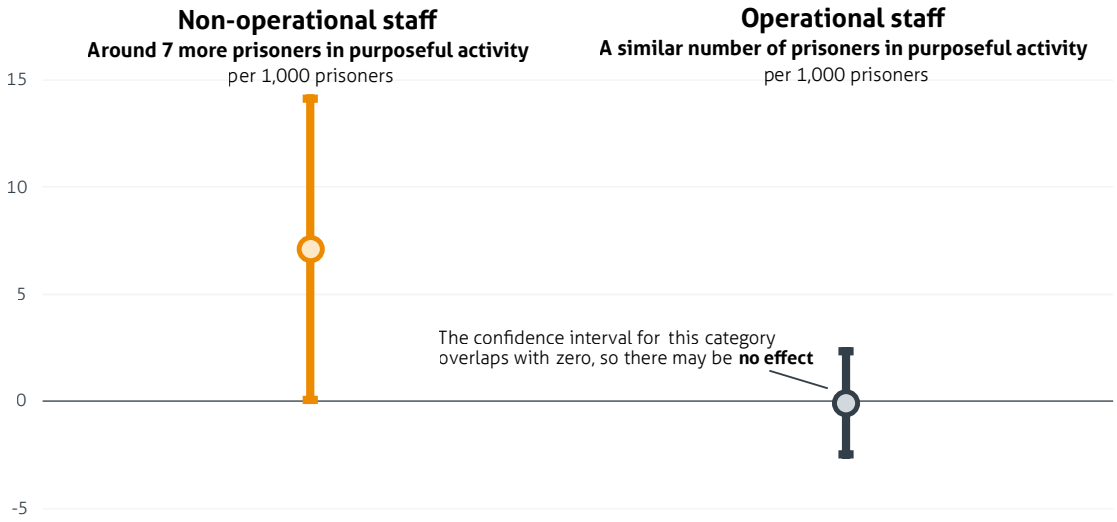
Alternatively, it may be that high levels of violence make it challenging for staff to deliver purposeful activity – a causal relationship running in the other direction – or that both lower violence and higher levels of purposeful activity are signs of a prison that is performing well in other ways, such as strong relationships between staff and prisoners or effective leadership and culture.

Purposeful activity is not associated with operational staffing levels or cost per prisoner

Perhaps surprisingly, we do not find a significant relationship between the proportion of prisoners in purposeful activity and either the number of operational staff per 1,000 prisoners or average cost per prisoner. This deserves attention as staff shortagesare frequently cited as a reason for a lack of purposeful activity, including bythe prisons inspectorate in its thematic review on time out of cell.[50] However, we find no relationship between total operational staff and rates of purposeful activity. While teachers and trainers are not included in the staffing figures we look at here, prison officers and operational support staff are responsible for running the prison regime, unlocking prisoners and escorting them around the prison as necessary, so thisis still a surprising finding. We also looked separately at the effect of more band 3 and 4 prison officers, and did not find a statistically significant effect on purposeful activity participation.

We did find a significant relationship between purposeful activity and non-operational staff. Non-operational roles vary widely, ranging from administrative support to psychologists. They include probation officers working in prisons and other offender management roles, which involve developing sentence plans, advising and supporting prisoners and developing effective relationships with them to support rehabilitation. Having more of these roles per prisoner may encourage more prisoners to participate in purposeful activity by providing additional motivation and accountability, or may simply be associated with more availability of activities.

Figure 12 **Each 10 additional staff of this type, per 1,000 prisoners, implies:**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024', MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2024', and MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023 to 2024 Supplementary Tables'. Notes: Based on 2023/24 data. Public prisons only; private prisons have been excluded due to data gaps. This chart shows the output from a multivariate regression; see Methodology for details.

The same is true on cost per prisoner: the purposeful activity participation rate is associated with a slightly higher cost per prisoner, but again this is not statistically significant. In fact, controlling for staffing levels, higher rates of purposeful activity are significantly associated with *lower* costs per prisoner, suggesting that savings associated with purposeful activity participation (such as lower violence levels)

outweigh the costs. In both cases, it may be that more staff *do* support a more comprehensive regime with more prisoners participating in purposeful activity, but this is outweighed by the stronger relationship between low purposeful activity participation and high violence, which also goes along with high staffing levels and high costs (discussed below).

These findings require an important caveat: we only have data on the proportion of prisoners in at least some purposeful activity, not on the amount of purposeful activity delivered. Two prisons, each with 100 prisoners, could each be delivering 200 hours of purposeful activity, one giving 100 prisoners two hours each and the second giving 20 prisoners 10 hours each. The first would have a purposeful activity rate of 100% and the second just 20%, even though they are delivering the same amount of activity. These findings do not therefore imply anything about the relationship between the amount of purposeful activity delivered and staffing or costs.

There is surprisingly little relationship between post-prison outcomes and conditions inside – though open prisons again do much better on employment

We find little relationship between short-term outcomes after release and conditions or activity in prison, although there is some other evidence that these do affect reoffending rates.[51,52] Open prisons have much higher rates of employment six weeks after release than any other prison type. Within prison categories, however, there is no identifiable relationship between employment and levels of purposeful activity, violence rates or overcrowding. This suggests that, excluding open prisons, employment rates after release are largely driven by external factors, rather than conditions within prisons – at least in the short term and in current circumstances, where resettlement support tends to be limited everywhere.

Similarly on housing, there is little relationship for individual prisons between conditions in prison and the proportion of prisoners housed on the first night after release. While higher performing prisons might be expected to have more time and attention to spend on resettlement work, this does not appear to be significant in terms of immediate accommodation outcomes, though this does not rule out a longer term impact. More crowded prisons and reception prisons both do worse on first night housing, but this is likely to reflect geographic and economic characteristics of the areas: more crowded prisons are likely to be in urban centres, particularly reception prisons, where there may also be more intense pressure on housing generally. This is also a very small effect, with only a few percentage points of variation in the proportion of prisoners housed for their first night after release.

Controlling for other factors, more violent prisons have more staff

Rates of prisoner-on-prisoner and staff assault are both associated with more operational staff per 1,000 prisoners. This includes all staff in operational roles, but the majority of these roles are band 2 operational support staff and band 3–4 prison officers. The median prison has 388 operational staff per 1,000 prisoners. A prison with 532 (the rate at the 75th percentile) will have an estimated 26% more prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and 44% more staff assaults than the median prison. The same

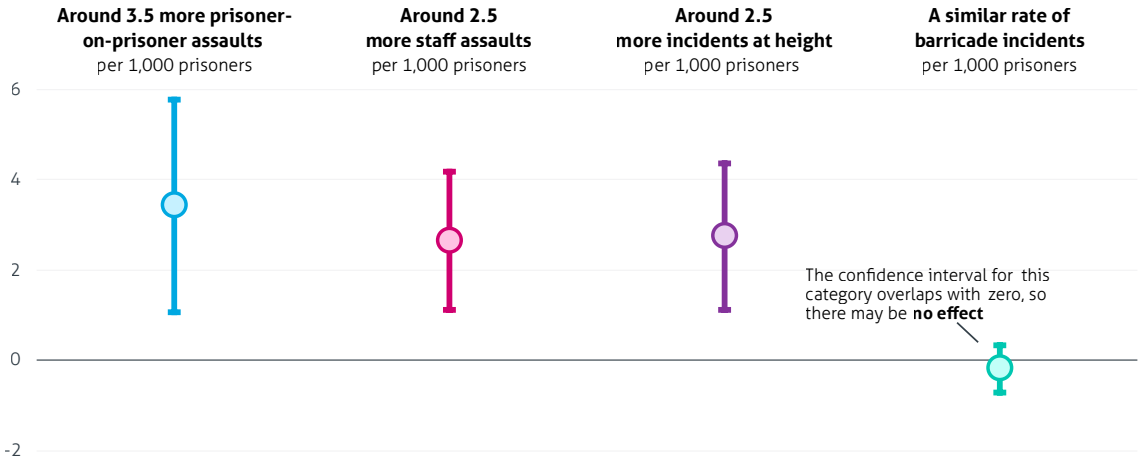
pattern applies even more strongly for incidents at height, which are an estimated 64% higher in the prison with more staff.

These effects are likely due to a combination of factors. Prisons that have previously had high levels of violence are likely to recruit more staff to manage that violence.[53] Some will also have physical infrastructure – such as limited central visibility of wingsor large distances between blocks – that make it harder to maintain order and security, which may lead to both higher staff requirements and more violence.[54] Higherstaffing levels may also increase the chance that violence is directly observed or reported by a prisoner, increasing recorded assaults even if the actual level of violence is not different.

Resignation rates are higher in more violent prisons, particularly where assaults on staff are more frequent. This higher turnover rate potentially mean that staff are less experienced and less likely to have developed relationships with prisoners, which could exacerbate violence.

> **"Lots of band 3 prison officers working the wings is a good thing – that's the traditional view. [But] if they are very inexperienced, then they are not really working the wings, they're sitting in an office terrified"– voluntary sector organisation**

Figure 13 **Each 10 additional operational staff, per 1,000 prisoners, implies:**

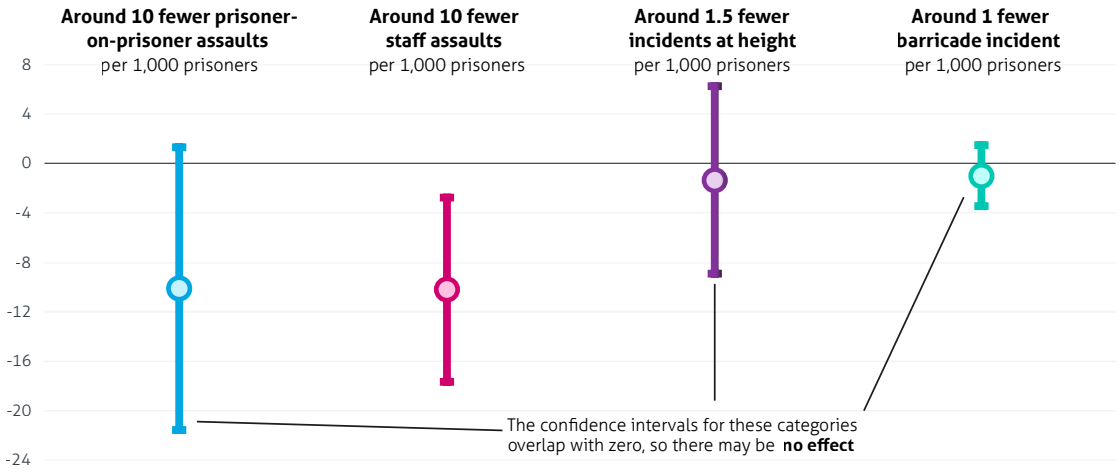


Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024', MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2024', and MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023 to 2024 Supplementary Tables'. Notes: Based on 2023/24 data. Staff numbers are based on full-time equivalent. Public prisons only; private prisons are excluded due to data gaps. This chart shows the output from a multivariate regression; see Methodology for details.

We also looked at officer seniority. A 1 percentage point shift in the proportion of operational staff that are senior officers (band 4 supervising officers and band 5 custodial managers) rather than junior prison officers is associated with lower levels of violence, particularly against staff. Staff assaults are around 19% lower in a prison where 13% of operational staff are senior officers, compared to the median prison, in which 11% are senior officers. Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults also appear to be lower; this finding was not significant based on 2023/24 data but was when we looked across

multiple years.* We found similar results when looking at the number of senior officers per 1,000 prisoners, rather than the proportion.** This may reflect either benefits of having more managers and supervising officers, or it may be a proxy for officer experience: these officers are typically more experienced than band 3–4 officers. As such, they may be better able to de-escalate situations that might otherwise deteriorate into violence and may have better relationships with or more respect from prisoners. We also find a small but significant relationship between more non-operational staff per 1,000 prisoners, and lower rates of assaults on staff. Again, this may be associated with stronger relationships between prisoners and non-operational staff such as offender managers.

Figure 14 **Each percentage point increase in the proportion of operational staff that are senior prison officers implies:**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024', MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2024', and MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023 to 2024 Supplementary Tables'. Notes: Based on 2023/24 data. Public prisons only; private prisons have been excluded due to data gaps. This chart shows the output from a multivariate regression estimating the effect of a shift of one percentage point of operational staff from band 3–4 prison officers to band 4–5 prison officers. See Methodology for details.

* We are unable to control for all variables across multiple years because of data gaps. See Methodology for details.

** We ran a number of different regressions to understand the relationship of staffing levels to violence and purposeful activity. See Methodology for details.

What should the government do with these findings?

Widespread prison declines reflect systemic but not insurmountable problems

The crisis surrounding the prisons system in England and Wales is well publicised, and recently brought back into the headlines by David Gauke's sentencing review, launched in October last year. Even still, it is striking just how widespread the decline in prison performance has been, affecting a large majority of prisons across a host of metrics. This suggests that, while particular prisons may be in more acute crisis, national deterioration reflects systemic problems more than widespread failures by individual prison governors or especially challenging prisoner cohorts.

There is little to suggest prisoners in general have become harder to manage over the last 10 or 20 years. While the proportion of prisoners sentenced for violent offences has grown, this does not necessarily suggest that we would expect violence in prisons to rise, as the relationship between offence type and involvement in violence in prison is complex.[55] Indeed, the growing age of the prison population is likely to mean lower levels of violence and protesting behaviours than would have been the case previously.[56] That the reverse has happened is telling.

At the same time, notable improvements in employment after release suggest prisoners are not increasingly unwilling nor unable to work and reintegrate into society. Rather, something is going on within the prison system itself that is causing severe and sustained declines in conditions.

And yet while these declines are widespread, they are not universal. Some prisons continue to perform well, such as Stafford and Warren Hill, and these provide models the government and HMPPS should seek to build on elsewhere. The relationships between certain prison characteristics or regimes and performance also suggest areas the government should target to deliver rapid improvements.

Recommendation 1: Establish a 'minimum regime' across prisons – adequately funded and with targets on purposeful activity

A prison regime is the timetable of activities in a prison, including when prisoners' cells are unlocked, meal and exercise times as well as work and education. There are currently very minimal requirements and no standard regime across prisons or within particular types of prison. In January 2024, a new national regime model was launched that set out 'core expectations', including a minimum of 60 minutes in the open air daily, subject to weather conditions and maintaining order, and a further 60 minutes out of cells, including for 'domestics' such as showering, laundry and so on. Each prison also has a target participation rate for purposeful activity, but this is typically fairly low and does not reflect a particular amount of purposeful activity delivered.

In the context of intense capacity pressure, rising levels of violence and protest and staff inexperience, it is unsurprising that purposeful activity has fallen by the wayside in many prisons. We have also heard that procurement challenges around prison education have worsened this effect.[57] While the causal relationship between purposeful activity, violence and protest is unclear, there is a strong association between higher levels of purposeful activity and lower levels of violence and protest and so a return to more normal levels of purposeful activity could help lower violence and improve outcomes.

At the very least, restoring activity levels should help develop the evidence on what contributes to violence and unrest in prisons. Given the harm caused by prison violence and the high costs associated with staffing violent prisons, including higher staff resignation rates, understanding this is crucial both to achieve better outcomes and improve value for money.

Establishing a minimum regime with a required level of both participation and hours of purposeful activity per prisoner would increase focus on purposeful activity and send a clear message that it is part of the core business and purpose of prisons. A minimum regime for each prison category would be ideal to reinforce the different purposes of different categories and allow an appropriate floor to be established in each setting. The minimum expectations should distinguish between purposeful activity that provides prisoners with skills, employment, rehabilitation or education, including therapy and rehabilitation courses ('tier 1' activity), and 'extra-curricular enrichment' activity, such as hobbies, recreational exercise and in-cell activities (tier 2 activity). Published data at the prison level should also distinguish between these different types of activity, to allow effective scrutiny of performance.

There should be adequate funding provided to make delivery of the minimum regime feasible. Crucially, this should include ensuring open prisons have sufficient purposeful activity available to provide for increasing prisoner numbers, including activity within the prison for those who are not yet eligible for day release. Much of the success of open prisons appears related to their high levels of purposeful activity, so it is vital that this is maintained.

Recommendation 2: Explore options for expanding access to open prisons

Open prisons consistently outperform other categories of prison on a range of measures – they are the only type of prison that clearly stands out. They are also cheaper on a per-prisoner basis, with men's open prisons averaging £45,130 per prisoner in 2022/23 compared to £51,108 across all prisons, despite some of the lowest rates of overcrowding in the whole estate.[58] Some of their strong performance is likely to be due to the selection of prisoners incarcerated in these types of prisons, and not every prisoner will be suitable for open conditions.

However, the ongoing temporary presumptive recategorisation scheme provides a valuable opportunity to assess the impact and feasibility of expanding access to open prisons. Under this scheme, most category C prisoners are presumed eligible for a transfer to an open prison if they have less than a year left on their sentence,* unless they present a "wholly unacceptable risk".[59,60] The government should evaluate the impact this scheme has had on the number and type of prisoners in open prisons, violence levels and purposeful activity in these prisons and (over time) reoffending rates, to see whether the scheme could be made permanent or even expanded further.

Similarly, the ongoing sentencing review should consider relaxing restrictions on how long and how much of their sentence prisoners serving determinate (fixed length) sentences can spend in open prisons. This has been capped at three years, but recently some prisoners are being transferred to open conditions with longer left on their sentence.[61] The government may not want prisoners to serve their whole sentence in an open prison, but facilitating more and earlier access to open prisons could ease pressure on other parts of the system and improve conditions and outcomes while lowering costs. This could also reduce the demand pressure and cost of increasingly long sentences.[62]

Recommendation 3: Identify elements of the open prison model that could be applied to other prisons

Existing open prisons may lack the capacity to take on large numbers of new prisoners, just as large numbers of prisoners may not be suitable for open prisons. But there may be elements of open prisons that can be applied to other types of prison. Higher levels of purposeful activity – which our findings show are significantly associated with lower levels of violence and protesting behaviour – and more responsibility around the prison could be implemented in a closed environment, for example. So could more opportunities for prisoners to earn privileges and progress towards recategorisation. Release on temporary licence for employment in the community is now generally restricted to open prisons, but has previously been available in category C training prisons as well.[63] Understanding what it is that makes open prisons safer and leads to better outcomes would help identify potential improvements for other types of prison.

Recommendation 4: Build on recent successes targeting employment after release

The improvements to employment after release suggest recent efforts targeting this have been successful. HMPPS should conduct an evaluation of the programme to identify if particular activities or approaches have been most effective, and then expand on these to maximise impact. Given the positive impact of employment on reducing reoffending, as well as other beneficial outcomes, this is likely to be a cost-effective initiative and would deliver on the government's aim to adopt a more preventative approach to crime.

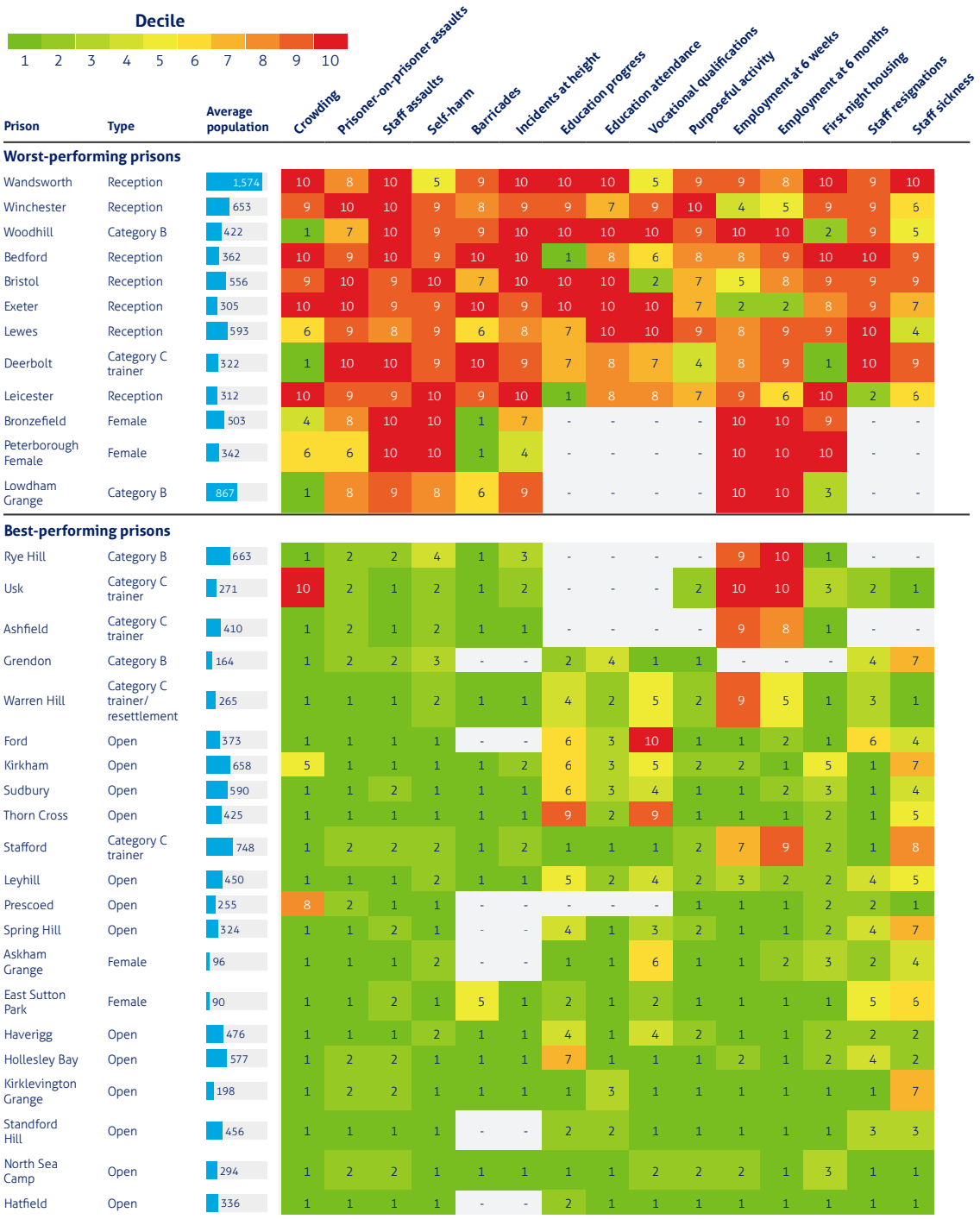
* Prisoners serving more than four years for a violent offence, convicted of a sexual or terrorist offence, or facing deportation at the end of their sentence are ineligible.

Annex

This table shows all prisons that are in the worst 20% of prisons for at least half of the metrics we have data for (the worst performing) and all prisons that are in the best 20% for at least half the metrics we have data for (the best performing). Lowdham Grange has also been included in the worst-performing category, despite being in the worst 20% for only 4 out of 9 metrics where we have data; this is because of significant data gaps and performance in the prison being so bad during 2023 and 2024 that it was taken back into public ownership. The numbers in the table show the decile each prison falls into for each category, with 1 meaning the best 10%, 2 meaning between 10-20%, and so on.

We selected these performance metrics from the Ministry of Justice's published performance statistics to cover a variety of areas of performance. We did not include any scores from the prisons inspectorate or other sources, only directly measured variables. Some metrics, such as the rate of escapes/absconds, were excluded as levels are so low they do not show significant variation across prisons or over time.

Figure 15 **Best- and worst-performing prisons, 2023/24**



Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Prison performance statistics 2023/24', MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest 2023/24', 'Crowding', and 'Protesting behaviour'. Notes: Numbers in the table indicate the decile each prison falls into for that performance metric, across the whole range of prisons for which data is available. 1 is the first decile, i.e. the best performing 10%, 2 the second best 10%, and so on. A high decile score indicates poor performance. Not all metrics are available for all prisons.

Regression methodology

Several findings in this paper are based on regression analysis. This annex explains the approach taken and provides tables of full regression results.

Data

The dataset for this analysis includes all public prisons in England and Wales. [Data is taken from several Ministry of Justice datasets:

- 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024'
- 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2024'
- 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023 to 2024 Supplementary Tables'.

Private prisons (14 out of 119 total prisons) are excluded because they are not required to report several key metrics, including staffing and the share of prisoners in purposeful activity.

For some prisons in some years, data is not available in the MoJ data because publishing the data would be disclosive and so values are suppressed. We exclude these prisons from analysis when using these variables. In total there are 101 public prisons in 2023/24, but seven have unavailable data for some key metrics like incidents at height.

The results presented in the body of the report are all based on data from 2023/24, as this is when we have the most complete data to let us control for as many factors as we can. Where possible, we have tested the results with data from other years to confirm that the relationship still held, which it did in all cases.

To understand the effect of different types of staff on outcome variables of interest, we group staff into two groups: non-operational staff (those not involved in day-to-day interactions with prisoners) and operational staff. We also include variables for the share of operational staff in different categories: Band 2 (junior operational staff), Band 4 supervisors and Band 5s (senior officers) and Band 6+ (senior managers). The excluded category are prison officers in Bands 3 and 4. Coefficients on these shares should be interpreted as the effect of a 1ppt of total operational staff change from Band 3 and 4 officers to the category.

Where relevant, all variables are expressed as either a rate per 1,000 prisoners or a share of all prisoners. This is specified in regression tables and in the list below.

List of variables

Variable	Years available 2020/21to 2023/24
Prison category	2020/21 to 2023/24
Prisoner-on-prisoner assault incidents per 1000 prisoners	2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24
Staff assault incidents per 1000 prisoners	2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24
Self-harm per 1000 prisoners	2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24
Incidents at height per 1000 prisoners	2020/21 to 2023/24
Barricade incidents per 1000 prisoners	2020/21 to 2023/24
Share of prisoners in crowded accommodation	2020/21 to 2023/24
Average prison population	2020/21 to 2023/24
Share of prisoners in purposeful activity	2022/23 and 2023/24
Staff resignation rate	2021/22 and 2023/24
Staff sickness rate	2023/24
Non-operational staff FTE per 1000 prisoners	2020/21 to 2023/24
Operational staff FTE per 1000 prisoners	2020/21 to 2023/24
Share of operational staff Band 2	2020/21 to 2023/24
Share of operational staff Band 3-4 officers	2020/21 to 2023/24
Share of operational staff senior officers (Band 4 supervisory or Band 5)	2020/21 to 2023/24
Share of operational staff in Band 6+	2020/21 to 2023/24
Share of prisoners achieving vocational qualifications	2022/23 and 2023/24
Cost per prisoner (£)	2022/23
Share of prisoners housed on the first night	2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24
Share of prisoners in employment six months after release	2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24

Explanation of approach taken

Our main results are based on cross-sectional linear regressions in 2023/24. This is the year in which data is available for all variables of interest. In addition, we conduct robustness checks including all years 2020/21 to 2023/24 where data is available (for some variables, specified in the tables below, data is not available in other years). For regressions covering multiple years, we cluster standard errors at the prison level.

Interpretation and presentation

The analysis controls for as many prison characteristics as the data allow, but it is possible that there are other features of prisons that we cannot control for that drive the results we observe. As a result, the regressions should be interpreted as a description of the observed relationship between prison characteristics, rather than necessarily causal relationships.

To explain the findings of the regressions more clearly, in some places in the report we demonstrate the implied effect of one variable on another at the median. To do this, multiply the coefficient on the independent variable by the difference between the 50th and 75th percentile of that variable. We then compare this to the median of the dependent variable to demonstrate the estimated size of the effect.

Full results

Drivers of violence and protest in prison

In our analysis, we looked at five measures of violence and protest in prisons (each measured as a rate per 1000 officers): prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, assaults on staff, self-harm incidents, incidents at height (an established prison protest) and barricades. As there are fewer barricade incidents and incidents at height, the value is suppressed for some small prisons.

Results for 2023/24 are presented in Table 1. Results for 2020/21 to 2023/24 are presented in Table 2.

Table 1 **Determinants of violence and protest, 2023/24**

Variables	Prisoner-on-prisoner	Staff assault	Self-harm incidents	Incidents at height	Barricades
Prison group (Category C trainer and resettlement omitted category)					
High security	-168.1**	16.35	-72.75	-101.2**	3.541
	(74.45)	(48.62)	(984.1)	(47.07)	(15.26)
Category B	-6.897	102.3***	434.9	23.63	10.22
	(53.35)	(34.84)	(705.3)	(33.61)	(10.90)
Category C resettlement	123.0***	14.47	-229.0	-10.32	2.080
	(45.57)	(29.76)	(602.3)	(30.75)	(9.970)
Category C trainer	15.23	24.91	-79.96	-16.86	-19.55**
	(35.88)	(23.43)	(474.3)	(23.06)	(7.479)
Open	90.78	126.0***	2,086**	22.49	-24.68*
	(62.19)	(40.61)	(822.1)	(43.57)	(14.13)
Reception	36.28	19.89	-679.2	-37.85	-14.85*
	(42.63)	(27.84)	(563.5)	(27.13)	(8.797)
Female	126.5**	255.0***	5,706***	-0.421	-29.89**
	(53.20)	(34.74)	(703.2)	(37.25)	(12.08)
% in crowded accommodation	0.871	1.304***	14.69*	1.256***	0.233*
	(0.665)	(0.434)	(8.788)	(0.428)	(0.139)
Average population	-0.0192	-0.00106	-0.597	0.0551	-0.00724
	(0.0509)	(0.0332)	(0.672)	(0.0335)	(0.0109)
% in purposeful activity	-4.090***	-2.551***	-24.95*	-1.077	-0.248
	(1.062)	(0.694)	(14.04)	(0.685)	(0.222)
Staff resignation rate	10.16***	7.132***	45.23	2.953*	1.009*
	(2.525)	(1.649)	(33.38)	(1.638)	(0.531)
Operational FTE per 1000	0.343***	0.265***	0.454	0.274***	-0.0186
	(0.120)	(0.0785)	(1.590)	(0.0829)	(0.0269)
Non-operational FTE per 1000	-0.495	-0.586**	-1.391	-0.432	0.200
	(0.383)	(0.250)	(5.061)	(0.387)	(0.126)
% of op. staff Band 2	-2.464	1.703	-38.92	3.099	1.416*
	(3.872)	(2.528)	(51.18)	(2.495)	(0.809)
% of op. staff senior officers	-10.11*	-10.20***	-112.4	-1.323	-0.957
	(5.855)	(3.823)	(77.39)	(3.875)	(1.256)
% of op. staff Band 6+	2.243	2.713	-396.2***	7.034	-0.947
	(10.70)	(6.986)	(141.4)	(7.780)	(2.523)
Constant	441.0***	190.3*	5,429**	-59.00	13.13
	(161.3)	(105.4)	(2,133)	(106.8)	(34.62)
Observations	101	101	101	94	94
R-squared	0.670	0.698	0.580	0.454	0.442

Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2023 to March 2024', MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2024', and MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings 2023 to 2024 Supplementary Tables'. Notes: In each case the dependent variable is the rate per 1000 prisoners. For operational staff shares, the omitted category is % of staff at Band 3-4 prison officers. Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 2 **Determinants of violence and protest, 2020/21-2023/24**

Variables	Prisoner-on-prisoner	Staff assault	Self-harm incidents	Incidents at height	Barricades
Prison group (Category C trainer and resettlement omitted category)					
High security	-260.5**	-39.68	-391.3	-60.44**	-14.45
	(104.3)	(39.95)	(458.1)	(26.45)	(9.343)
Category B	-39.96	70.44*	436.2*	13.38	2.178
	(57.06)	(39.33)	(224.6)	(27.48)	(7.917)
Category C resettlement	60.48	-15.41	-280.5*	-17.96	-8.480
	(90.28)	(22.08)	(155.8)	(18.78)	(8.683)
Category C trainer	-3.573	-17.86	-245.2**	-25.80*	-18.78***
	(42.76)	(15.19)	(105.6)	(13.37)	(5.788)
Open	-113.8**	-40.98*	229.8	-39.70**	-33.82***
	(51.92)	(23.91)	(462.2)	(16.27)	(7.328)
Reception	49.59	34.29	-310.9	-4.642	-8.328
	(38.93)	(21.15)	(286.8)	(18.26)	(5.336)
Female	-20.57	121.1***	3,756***	-37.34*	-23.93***
	(59.40)	(42.85)	(991.4)	(20.19)	(7.240)
% in crowded accommodation	0.572	1.004**	8.385*	0.648**	0.0726
	(0.745)	(0.475)	(4.796)	(0.315)	(0.0891)
Average population	-0.0595	-0.0325	-0.313	0.0111	-0.0115
	(0.0711)	(0.0357)	(0.266)	(0.0420)	(0.00768)
Operational FTE per 1000	0.409**	0.210***	1.156	0.135***	0.00618
	(0.195)	(0.0682)	(0.831)	(0.0488)	(0.0125)
Non-operational FTE per 1000 prisoners	-0.915***	-0.696***	-4.872*	-0.308**	-0.0350
	(0.285)	(0.202)	(2.792)	(0.147)	(0.0585)
Share of op. staff Band 2	-0.267	0.888	-31.76	2.690*	0.447
	(3.838)	(1.839)	(25.34)	(1.478)	(0.404)
% of op. staff senior officers	-12.67***	-8.791**	-109.3*	-1.502	-1.021
	(4.805)	(3.842)	(59.31)	(2.753)	(0.741)
Share of op. staff Band 6+	9.151	7.579	-80.82	2.650	1.064
	(8.716)	(6.095)	(120.2)	(3.549)	(1.224)
year = 2021/22				0.216	0.382
				(2.707)	(1.204)
year = 2022/23	18.53*	-15.18**	19.68	10.82*	1.040
	(10.21)	(7.528)	(93.00)	(6.259)	(1.639)
year = 2023/24	37.56***	1.848	118.5	29.56***	6.509***
	(11.64)	(9.251)	(164.4)	(8.399)	(2.434)
Constant	276.7**	161.3**	3,018**	-18.31	38.52**
	(125.4)	(78.28)	(1,180)	(68.71)	(15.47)
Observations	300	300	300	387	387
R-squared	0.416	0.447	0.508	0.315	0.279

Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest', 2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–2024, MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings Supplementary Tables', 2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–2024, and MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2024'. Notes: In each case the dependent variable is the rate per 1000 prisoners. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Data not available for prisoner-on-prisoner assault, staff assault or self-harm incidents for 2020/21, so regression only covers 2021/22 to 2023/24. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Relationship between different measures of violence and protest, 2021/22-2023/24

We also explored whether the different measures of violence and protest in prisons were correlated with one another. The results are shown in table 3.

Table 3 **Relationship between violence and protest measures**

Variables	Prisoner-on-prisoner	Staff assault	Self-harm incidents	Incidents at height
Prisoner on prisoner assault rate per 1,000 prisoners		0.164***	-0.0857	0.108***
		(0.0260)	(0.485)	(0.0225)
Assaults on staff rate per 1,000 prisoners	0.668***		7.289***	0.278***
	(0.106)		(0.891)	(0.0445)
Self harm rate per 1,000 prisoners	-0.00113	0.0235***		0.000555
	(0.00638)	(0.00288)		(0.00267)
Incidents at height rate per 1,000 prisoners	0.614***	0.389***	0.240	
	(0.128)	(0.0621)	(1.157)	
Barricade rate per 1,000 prisoners	-0.287	0.946***	-8.244***	0.564***
	(0.354)	(0.167)	(3.052)	(0.145)
Prison group (Category C trainer and resettlement omitted)				
High security	-87.85***	60.48***	-182.0	-17.34
	(31.59)	(15.48)	(278.6)	(13.37)
Category B	-53.43**	49.35***	-182.7	-1.359
	(24.68)	(12.01)	(216.6)	(10.42)
Category C resettlement	111.2***	21.34	-270.6	-27.53**
	(28.02)	(14.17)	(249.8)	(11.93)
Category C trainer	33.80	18.61*	-202.5	-21.44**
	(21.07)	(10.43)	(184.2)	(8.790)
Open	-73.05***	24.33*	-264.3	-19.52*
	(25.11)	(12.53)	(221.4)	(10.61)
Reception	50.89***	56.78***	-429.5**	-16.84**
	(19.36)	(9.167)	(169.0)	(8.151)
Female	-27.40	66.15***	2,943***	-73.35***
	(34.97)	(16.95)	(257.6)	(14.10)
year = 2022/23	25.06*	-19.12***	202.1	8.258
	(14.56)	(7.169)	(127.1)	(6.116)
year = 2023/24	23.89	-13.46*	155.5	17.09***
	(15.02)	(7.432)	(131.2)	(6.249)
Constant	66.42***	-12.46	137.3	9.623
	(17.76)	(8.964)	(158.1)	(7.589)
Observations	337	337	337	337
R-squared	0.539	0.712	0.677	0.548

Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings Supplementary Tables', 2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–2024.Notes:In each case the dependent variable is the rate per 1,000 prisoners. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Notes: In each case the dependent variable is the rate per 1,000 prisoners. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Data not available for prisoner-on-prisoner assault, staff assault or self-harm incidents for 2020/21, so regression only covers 2021/22 to 2023/24. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Drivers of purposeful activity in prison

We also conducted regressions looking at the best predictors of purposeful activity in prisons. We looked at two variables: the share of prisoners undertaking purposeful activity, and the share receiving vocational qualifications.

Results for 2023/24, and combined results for 2022/23 and 2023/24, are presented in Table 4. As this data is only available from 2022/23, we cannot use earlier years of data.

Table 4 **Determinants of purposeful activity in prisons**

Variables	Purposeful activity participation rate 2023/24 only	Purposeful activity participation rate 2022/23 & 2023/24	Vocational qualification 2023/24 only	Vocational qualifications 2022/23 & 2023/24
Prison group (Category C trainer and resettlement omitted category)				
High security	0.341	-6.578	0.118**	0.0836***
	(7.100)	(9.574)	(0.0485)	(0.0312)
Category B	2.996	0.194	0.0569	0.0763***
	(5.203)	(4.618)	(0.0359)	(0.0282)
Category C resettlement	2.512	0.519	-0.00667	0.0142
	(4.377)	(4.342)	(0.0297)	(0.0176)
Category C trainer	5.958*	5.497*	0.0451**	0.0566**
	(3.276)	(3.280)	(0.0222)	(0.0221)
Open	29.32***	28.46***	0.0261	0.0966***
	(5.178)	(4.965)	(0.0356)	(0.0322)
Reception	-1.086	-2.169	-0.0397	-0.0577*
	(4.024)	(3.652)	(0.0278)	(0.0303)
Female	23.18***	17.64***	0.0229	0.0529**
	(6.353)	(4.552)	(0.0430)	(0.0257)
% in crowded accommodation	0.0567	0.0325	0.000915**	0.00127***
	(0.0643)	(0.0592)	(0.000447)	(0.000420)
Average population	-0.000990	-0.00154	7.67e-05**	9.19e-05***
	(0.00472)	(0.00543)	(3.77e-05)	(3.11e-05)
Operational FTE per 1,000 prisoners	-0.000755	0.00397	-1.82e-05	8.18e-05
	(0.0122)	(0.0109)	(8.41e-05)	(5.41e-05)
Non-operational FTE per 1,000 prisoners	0.0711*	0.0680**	0.000263	4.84e-05
	(0.0359)	(0.0275)	(0.000243)	(0.000162)
Share of op. staff band 2	-0.367	-0.454	0.00338	0.00148
	(0.360)	(0.280)	(0.00249)	(0.00198)
Share of op. staff senior officers (band 4 and 5)	-0.807	-0.398	-0.000202	0.00299
	(0.559)	(0.414)	(0.00384)	(0.00290)
Share of op. staff band 6+	-0.864	-0.886	0.0123*	0.00448
	(1.052)	(1.017)	(0.00717)	(0.00560)
Staff resignation rate	0.0611		-0.000171	
	(0.270)		(0.00184)	
Prisoner-on-prisoner assault rate per 1,000 prisoners	-0.0279***	-0.0325***	-6.47e-05	-8.87e-05**
	(0.00987)	(0.00743)	(6.75e-05)	(4.20e-05)

Assaults on staff rate per 1,000 prisoners	-0.0399**	-0.0340***	-0.000106	-0.000109
	(0.0179)	(0.0114)	(0.000124)	(8.70e-05)
Self-harm rate per 1,000 prisoners	1.81e-05	-0.000135	8.82e-06	3.79e-06
	(0.000890)	(0.000559)	(6.07e-06)	(3.72e-06)
year = 2023/24		4.536***		0.0711***
		(0.855)		(0.00868)
Constant	81.63***	75.88***	0.683***	0.610***
	(13.17)	(10.68)	(0.0918)	(0.0742)
Observations	101	202	98	196
R-squared	0.733	0.718	0.398	0.446

Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings Supplementary Tables', 2022–23 and 2023–24, and MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly', March 2023 and March 2024.
Notes: Data only available in 2022/23 and 2023/24. Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Drivers of staff resignation in prison

To understand the predictors of staff sentiment, we conducted regressions with staff resignation rates and staff sickness rates as the dependent variables. Data on staff resignation rates is not available in 2022/23, and data on staff sickness is not available in 2020/21, 2021/22 or 2022/23.

Table 5 **Determinants of staff resignation & sickness rate, 2020/21 to 2023/24**

Variables	Staff resignation 2023/24 only	Staff resignation 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2023/24	Staff sickness 2023/24 only
Prison group (Category C trainer and resettlement omitted category)			
High security	-4.774	-3.876*	-1.528
	(2.902)	(2.070)	(1.062)
Category B	-4.916**	-3.047*	-0.220
	(2.086)	(1.682)	(1.575)
Category C resettlement	-3.251*	-1.984*	1.677
	(1.779)	(1.031)	(1.128)
Category C trainer	-1.871	-2.057	1.163
	(1.370)	(1.383)	(0.871)
Open	-4.436*	-6.035***	3.205**
	(2.368)	(1.477)	(1.309)
Reception	-4.196***	-0.966	-0.193
	(1.318)	(1.281)	(0.881)
Female	-7.610***	-5.176***	2.670*
	(2.651)	(1.560)	(1.386)
Average population	-0.000595	-0.000604	0.00213*
	(0.00195)	(0.00293)	(0.00109)
Self-harm rate per 1,000 prisoners	-0.000305	9.87e-05	-0.000131
	(0.000368)	(0.000307)	(0.000156)
Prisoner-on-prisoner assault rate per 1,000 prisoners	0.0110***	-0.00163	0.00431*
	(0.00411)	(0.00228)	(0.00241)
Assaults on staff rate per 1,000 prisoners	0.0197***	0.0131**	0.000154
	(0.00712)	(0.00580)	(0.00469)

% in purposeful activity	0.00221		-0.0800**
	(0.0456)		(0.0354)
Operational FTE per 1,000 prisoners	-0.00399	-0.00165	0.000158
	(0.00492)	(0.00357)	(0.00222)
Non-operational FTE per 1,000 prisoners	0.0202	0.00271	0.0157**
	(0.0150)	(0.0101)	(0.00676)
Share of op. staff band 2	-0.0891	0.0810	-0.123
	(0.150)	(0.113)	(0.0998)
Share of op. staff senior officers (band 4 and 5)	0.202	-0.0585	-0.0876
	(0.233)	(0.153)	(0.130)
Share of op. staff band 6+	-0.328	0.0315	-0.150
	(0.437)	(0.330)	(0.257)
year = 2021/22		1.047	
		(0.641)	
year = 2023/24		-0.810	
		(0.643)	
Constant	6.998	9.741**	15.02***
	(6.560)	(4.562)	(4.405)
Observations	101	294	101
R-squared	0.487	0.244	0.339

Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings Supplementary Tables', 2020–21, 2021–22 and 2023–24. Notes: Data for staff sickness only available for 2023/24. Staff resignation rate not available for 2022/23. Notes: Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Drivers of cost in prison

We also explored the drivers of total prison costs per prisoner. In one specification, we do not control for staffing (so staff costs are included). In another specification, we do control for staffing, so results are conditional on staffing levels. This data is only available in 2022/23

Table 6 **Determinants of cost per prisoner (£), 2022/23**

Variables	No staff controls	With staff controls
Prison group (Cat C trainer and resettlement omitted category)		
High security	44,250***	-9,980***
	(7,319)	(3,560)
Category B	15,185**	-41.41
	(6,844)	(2,415)
Category C resettlement	-4,411	901.2
	(6,862)	(2,328)
Category C trainer	3,325	2,216
	(4,957)	(1,663)
Open	-1,904	9,759***
	(7,205)	(2,819)
Reception	4,980	-2,772
	(5,686)	(2,018)
Female	31,489***	-4,435
	(9,514)	(3,575)

% in crowded accommodation	-159.5*	-39.88
	(88.81)	(31.77)
Average population	-19.32***	11.51***
	(5.738)	(2.434)
% in purposeful activity	103.1	-127.4**
	(144.6)	(49.95)
Prisoner on prisoner assault rate per 1,000 prisoners	72.00***	5.664
	(12.53)	(5.223)
Assaults on staff rate per 1,000 prisoners	-26.88	9.841
	(31.13)	(10.44)
Self harm rate per 1,000 prisoners	-2.752*	-0.286
	(1.509)	(0.516)
Incidents at height rate per 1,000 prisoners	64.92**	-0.787
	(32.27)	(11.43)
Operational FTE per 1,000 prisoners		89.98***
		(5.289)
Non-operational FTE per 1,000 prisoners		119.1***
		(20.71)
Share of op. staff band 2		-202.2
		(174.9)
Share of op. staff senior officers (band 4 and 5)		516.0**
		(251.1)
Share of op. staff band 6+		804.5
		(570.0)
Constant	45,415***	-7,747
	(11,965)	(7,967)
Observations	97	96
R-squared	0.681	0.967

Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'Prison performance data 2022 to 2023' (Costs per prison place and prisoner by individual prison 2022 to 2023), MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest', 2022–23, MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings Supplementary Tables', 2022–23 and MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2023'.
Notes: Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Drivers of post-prison outcomes

The final set of regressions explores the relationship between prison characteristics and post-prison outcomes (whether an individual is housed on the first night after prison, and whether they are employed six weeks later).

Table 7 **Determinants of post-prison outcomes, 2021/22 to 2023/24**

Variables	Housed first night after release 2023/24 only	Housed first night after release all years	Employment 6 weeks after release 2023/24 only	Employment 6 weeks after release all years
Prison group (Cat C trainer and resettlement omitted category)				
High security		11.44***		-7.786**
		(3.556)		(3.462)
Category B	7.660***	4.675	-10.54**	-7.103***
	(2.134)	(4.343)	(5.136)	(2.673)
Category C resettlement	0.476	-1.397	2.166	0.191
	(1.463)	(2.017)	(3.520)	(1.398)
Category C trainer	3.911***	4.277***	-3.947	-4.710***
	(1.148)	(1.151)	(2.764)	(1.411)
Open	1.186	2.732	18.55***	15.97***
	(2.077)	(1.910)	(4.998)	(4.099)
Reception	-10.80***	-9.114***	1.129	1.621
	(1.395)	(2.627)	(3.356)	(1.722)
Female	-1.917	-1.037	-8.320	0.685
	(2.502)	(1.745)	(6.022)	(4.640)
% in crowded accommodation	-0.0571**	-0.0535	-0.00623	-0.0114
	(0.0228)	(0.0402)	(0.0548)	(0.0214)
Average population	-0.000355	-0.00508	0.00158	-0.00245
	(0.00204)	(0.00314)	(0.00492)	(0.00276)
Operational FTE per 1,000 prisoners	-0.000634	-0.00732	-0.0228*	-0.0130**
	(0.00475)	(0.00584)	(0.0114)	(0.00592)
Non-operational FTE per 1,000 prisoners	0.00371	0.0198	0.120***	0.0328
	(0.0186)	(0.0181)	(0.0447)	(0.0296)
Share of op. staff band 2	0.178	0.120	0.0337	0.117
	(0.131)	(0.180)	(0.315)	(0.168)
Share of op. staff senior officers (band 4 and 5)	0.102	0.0680	0.955*	0.341
	(0.210)	(0.334)	(0.506)	(0.292)
Share of op. staff band 6+	0.378	-0.334	-0.153	-0.509
	(0.381)	(0.372)	(0.918)	(0.791)
Staff resignation rate	0.0797		0.112	
	(0.0918)		(0.217)	
Staff resignation rate	0.0902		0.108	
	(0.0921)		(0.222)	
% in purposeful activity	0.0658		-0.00890	
	(0.0424)		(0.102)	
Achievement of vocational qualifications	-7.531		-5.415	
	(5.779)		(13.91)	
Prisoner on prisoner assault rate per 1,000 prisoners	0.00529	0.00608**	0.00304	0.00301
	(0.00366)	(0.00282)	(0.00880)	(0.00341)

year = 2022/23		7.307***		5.460***
		(0.894)		(0.790)
year = 2023/24		11.22***		9.221***
		(1.131)		(1.020)
Constant	89.04***	84.74***	5.238	9.317
	(6.628)	(6.693)	(15.95)	(8.811)
Observations	90	291	90	292
R-squared	0.898	0.692	0.701	0.657

Source: Institute for Government analysis of MoJ, 'HMPPS Annual Digest', 2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–24, MoJ, 'Annual Prison Performance Ratings Supplementary Tables', 2021–22, 2022–23 and 2023–24, and MoJ, 'HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly', March 2022, March 2023 and March 2024'. Notes: Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. No data is available for high security prisons in 2023 as the value is suppressed due to a small sample size.

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